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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5375

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0442

RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000657

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL SY IZ

SUBJECT: RARE SYRIAN PROMISE FULFILLED BY NAMING AMBASSADOR  
TO IRAQ

REF: A. DAMASCUS 560

1B. AUGUST 18 EMBASSY DAMASCUS-NEA/ELA EMAIL

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Tim Pounds for 1.5 b and d.

11. (C) Summary: Syrian President Bashar Asad swore in Nawaf al-Fares as the new Syrian Ambassador to Iraq on September 16, the first such appointment in over 24 years. This move was expected but did not occur as part of a visit by Iraqi FM Zebari to Damascus, as SARG officials had hoped. Iraqi and Syrian sources here tell us Zebari's visit and the appointment of an Iraqi Ambassador to Syria remain on hold. End Summary

12. (C) Biographical details of al-Fares are scant. Contacts report he is roughly 60 years old and was born in a village near the Iraqi/Syrian border city of Abu Kamal. A senior official of the Ba'ath Party, he served in the Political Security Department in the eastern region close to the Iraqi border, and was then promoted to head the Political Security branch in Lattakia. Al-Fares served as Governor of Idlib, Lattakia, and most recently Quneitra before being named as ambassador. One source told us al-Fares played a prominent role in the SARG's brutal suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood's 1982 uprising in the city of Hama.

13. (SBU) Al-Fares also is believed to have extensive connections to tribes residing in Iraq through family ties in eastern Syria. Today's Ashraq Al-Awsat newspaper reported Al-Fares' selection was due to "his extensive work experience in the eastern region bordering Iraq, in addition to being from that region which is very close to the social structure intertwined with the Iraqi environment."

14. (C) The SARG's official announcement, which Syrians officials expected to make during a now-postponed visit by FM Zebari, left unclear exactly when al-Fares would arrive in Baghdad. Iraqi Embassy sources here suggested that the Syrian Embassy's current location outside the International Zone might significantly delay the Ambassador's arrival until security can be upgraded.

15. (C) Comment: The appointment of al-Fares represents a rare example of a fulfilled SARG promise. The regime's self-interest in achieving oil and gas pipeline deals, increased bilateral trade, and a desire to exercise greater influence over GOI decisions are the most obvious motives for this decision. Some observers here are even suggesting Syria's appointment of an envoy to Iraq may signal a desire for better relations with the U.S., although we have seen ample evidence to the contrary. The timing of this decision puts Syria in the company of Jordan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE in appointing envoys to Iraq and sending a positive (albeit low cost) message to PM Maliki in Baghdad. Previously, the SARG had balked at taking this step without

the near-term prospect of Iraqi reciprocity. Its willingness to make such a gesture now may reflect increased confidence after President Sarkozy's visit and a more pressing desire for better bilateral trade relations.

CONNELLY